Big Apple Rag for woodwind quintet, op. 49a

The spelling for the then exotic fruit pineapple was not yet standardized when Joplin wrote his Pine Apple Rag. Titles that relate to the kingdom of flora were popular then; I doubt whether the master's pungently sweet work was ever meant to represent the delectable food! My work does try to capture the nervous energy of the big city that lay across the Hudson from me in Weehawken when I started it, and where I now finally live as of this writing.

I was at work on this quintet version of the rag when I met hornist and conductor Samuel Gindin last year. Although he does occasionally play in quintets, he was much more interested in having a new band piece from my pen when he became familiar with my compositions. So, I went back to the drawing board and started the number again for concert band, using the working materials that had thus far amassed. The composition for band finished itself at white heat, just in time for a tour Sam's band was embarking on; a big hit in fact in three different cities!

I later came across my original woodwind quintet sketches (in a key a semitone lower, by the way). I decided to look through the band version to see whether it would be feasible to adapt the remainder of the composition for the smaller group. I have to say, I did cogently resist this notion at first, but I think it was simply out of fondness for some of the percussion licks I had got in! Once I was willing to make this incalculable musical sacrifice, I was able finally to realize the alternative version. And that is why the quintet version, although begun first, got the designation opus 49a, because it was finished last! The work is dedicated to Sam, and I'm lucky that amidst all this transmogrification there is always a suitable work for him to perform: before, he was the conductor; now, on horn, he can also be the chamber music executant!

There is a slow intro based on a jaunty march that will be heard much later on horn and bassoon. But that's actually *not* what we hear first. The other three instruments, who won't get to play the catchy march, stage a coup: they start presenting it peremptorily up to tempo, before any other intro. (The march qua quickstep, however, proves unsuitable as an outright opener, and is brushed aside within a few measures.) The slow intro can then be said to have its own fast intro! Such "musicians wrestle everywhere" competitiveness prepares us for all the *Klangfarben* that's upcoming. Yes, as soon as your ear settles on some instrumental line, some other instrument seems intent on swaying your attention, tries in other words to steal the show! At the rag's end, the horn actually usurps a thirty-second note motive that the flute had solely—and idiomatically—rendered up to this point. After a flustered flurry of but three notes, however, we hear the intrinsically less agile brass instrument stopping short, resulting in a *Generalpause*. Followed by ...what else? A pat Broadway button.

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New York City

Performance notes

A literal and figurative (musical) breath would seem to be called for at each of the double barlines, i.e., the one leading into the Adagio (m. 4) and the one leading out of it (m. 18). The rest of the rag should probably be played fairly giusto. The parallel major Coda (m. 148), however, has involved a press to the end in some performances.

to Samuel Gindin

Big Apple Rag

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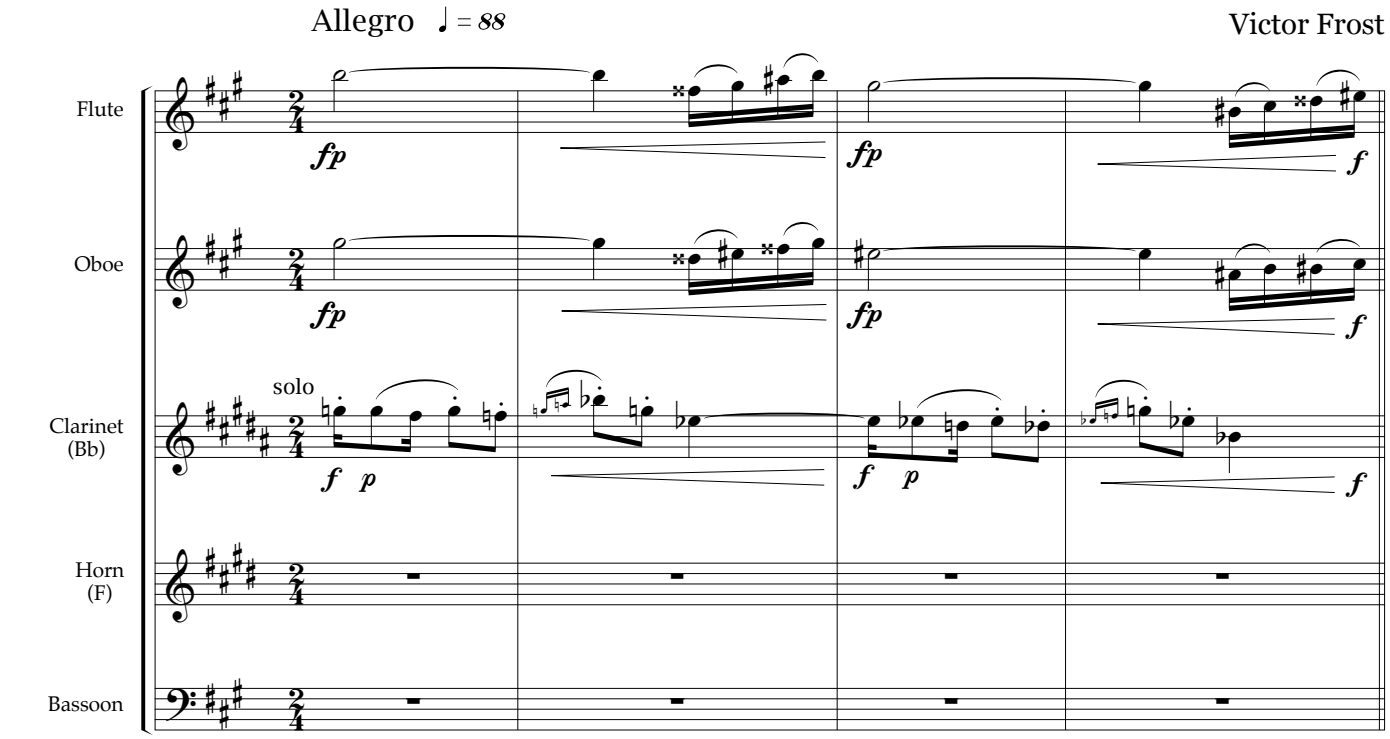

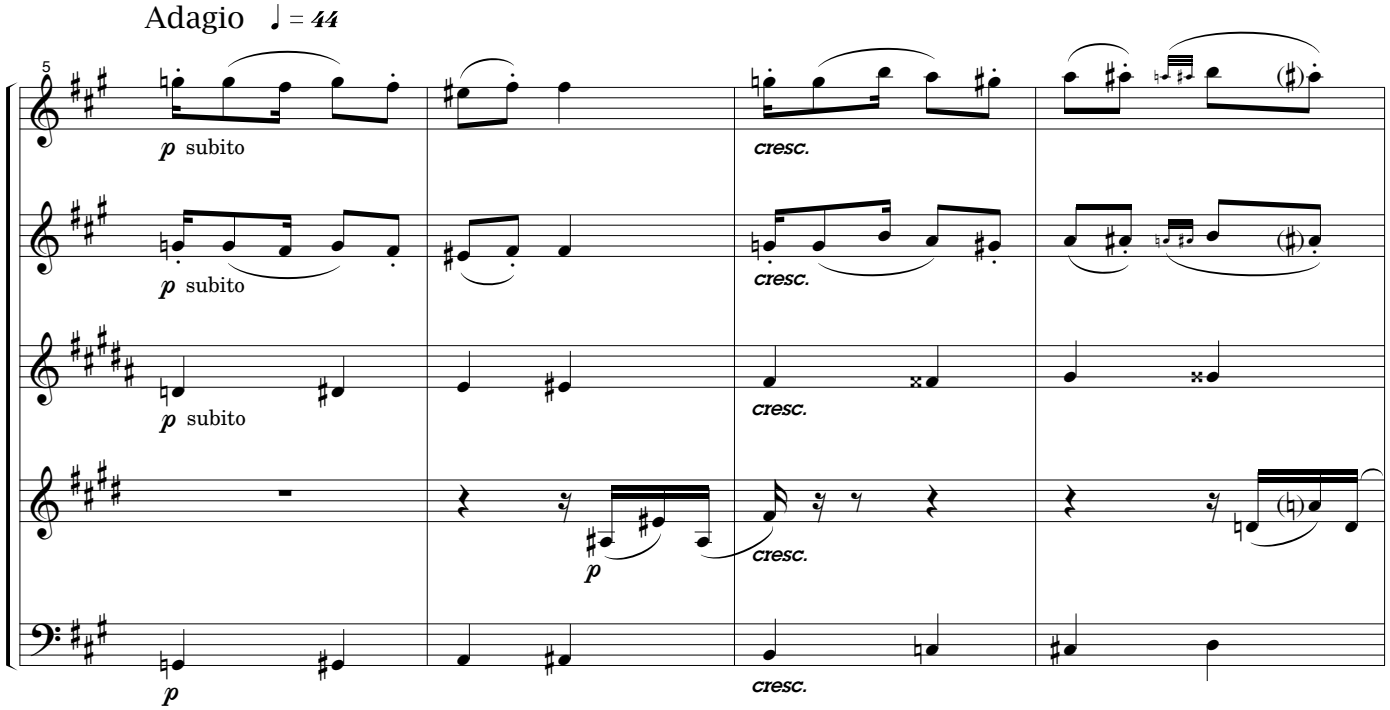

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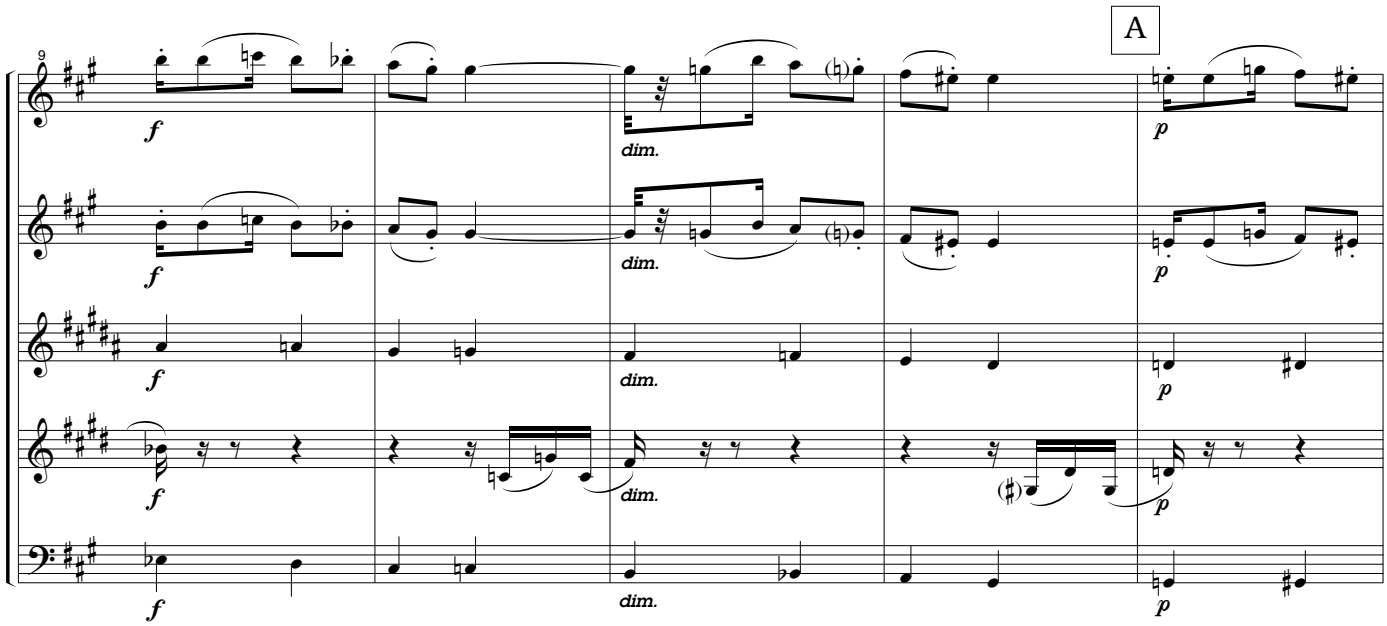
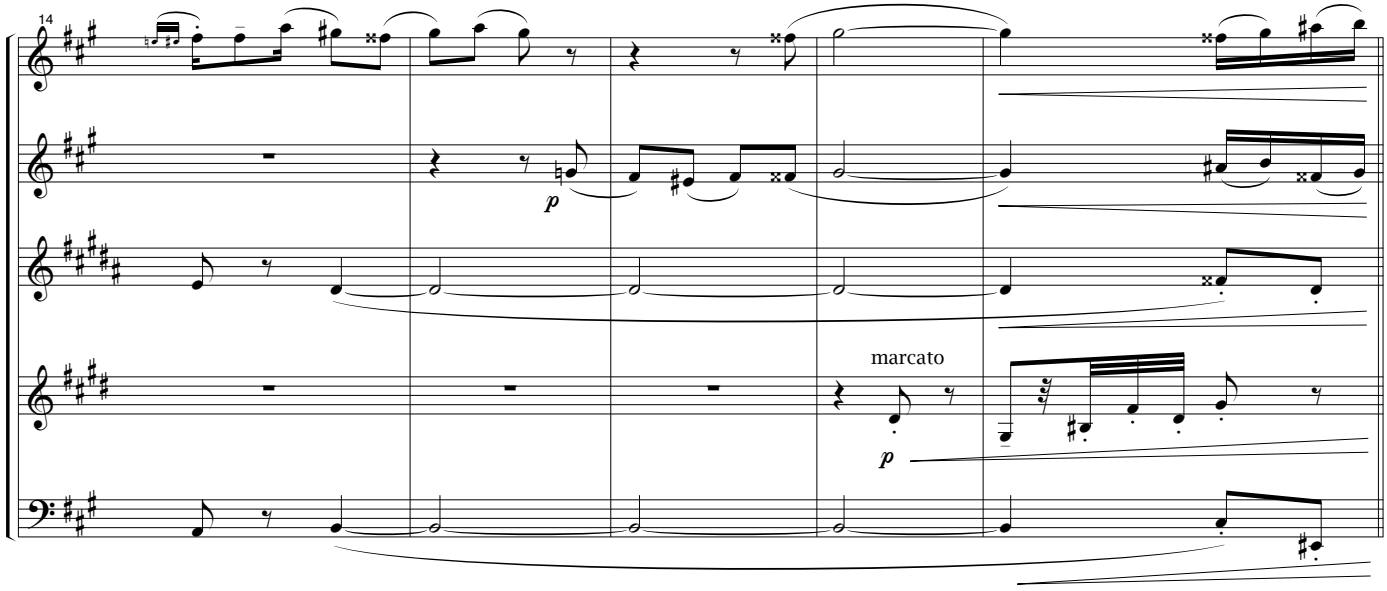
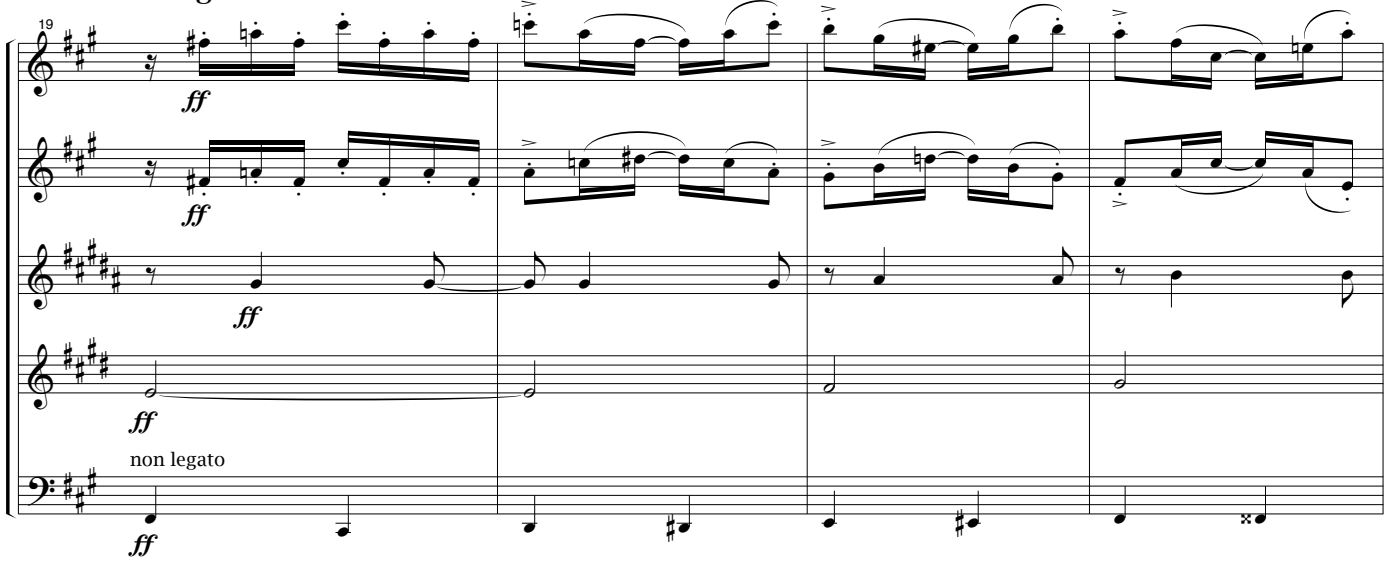
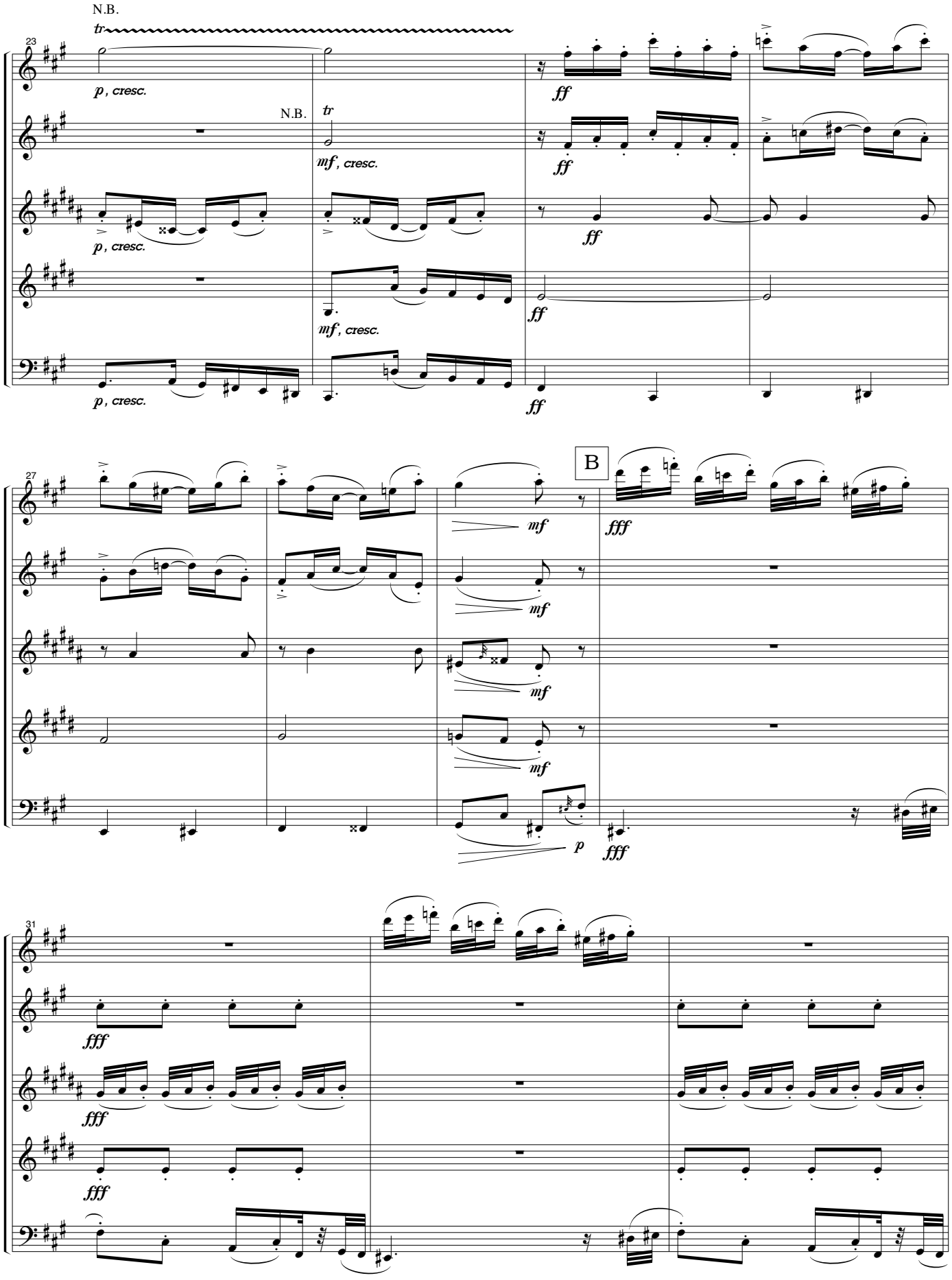


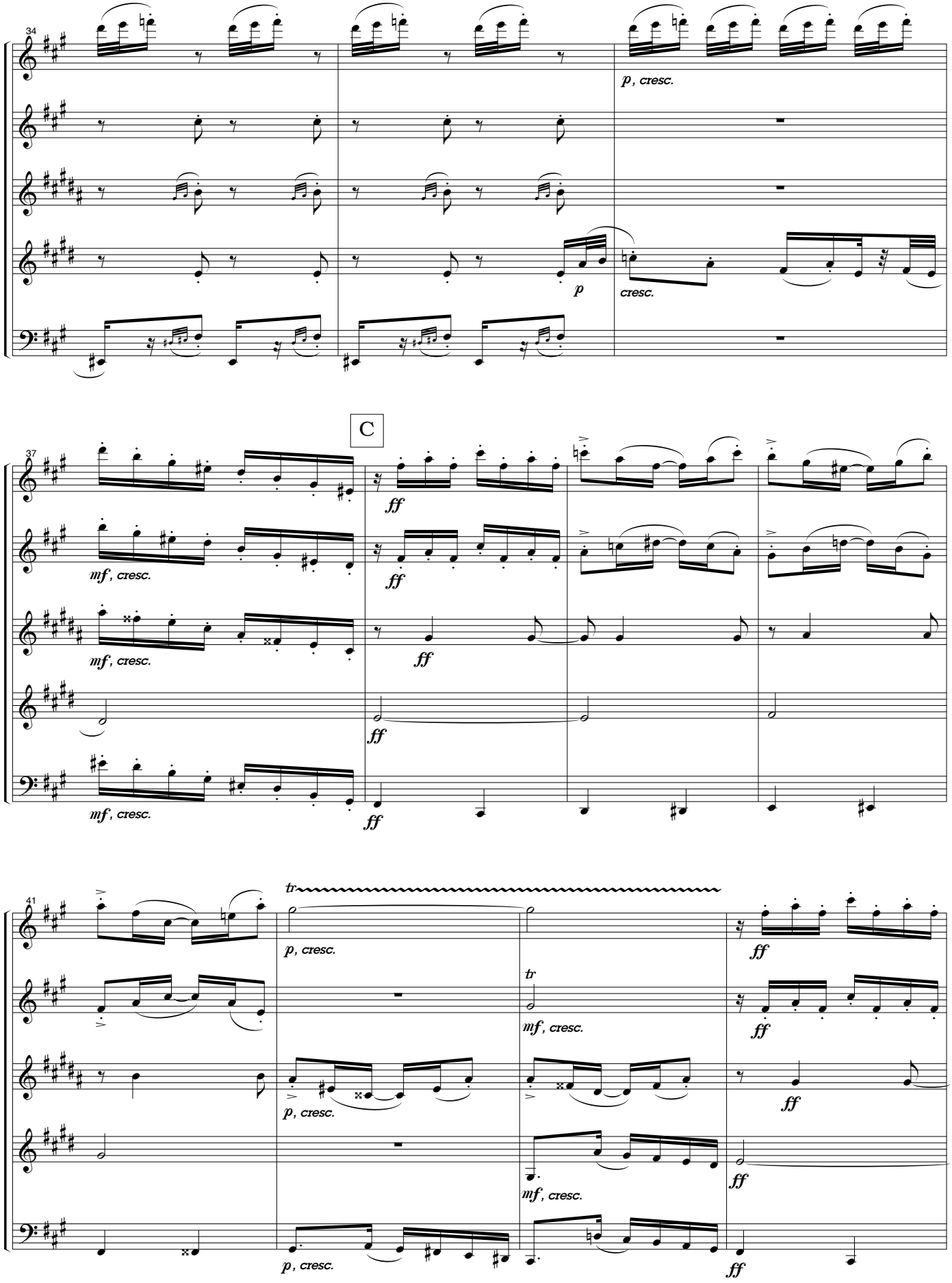


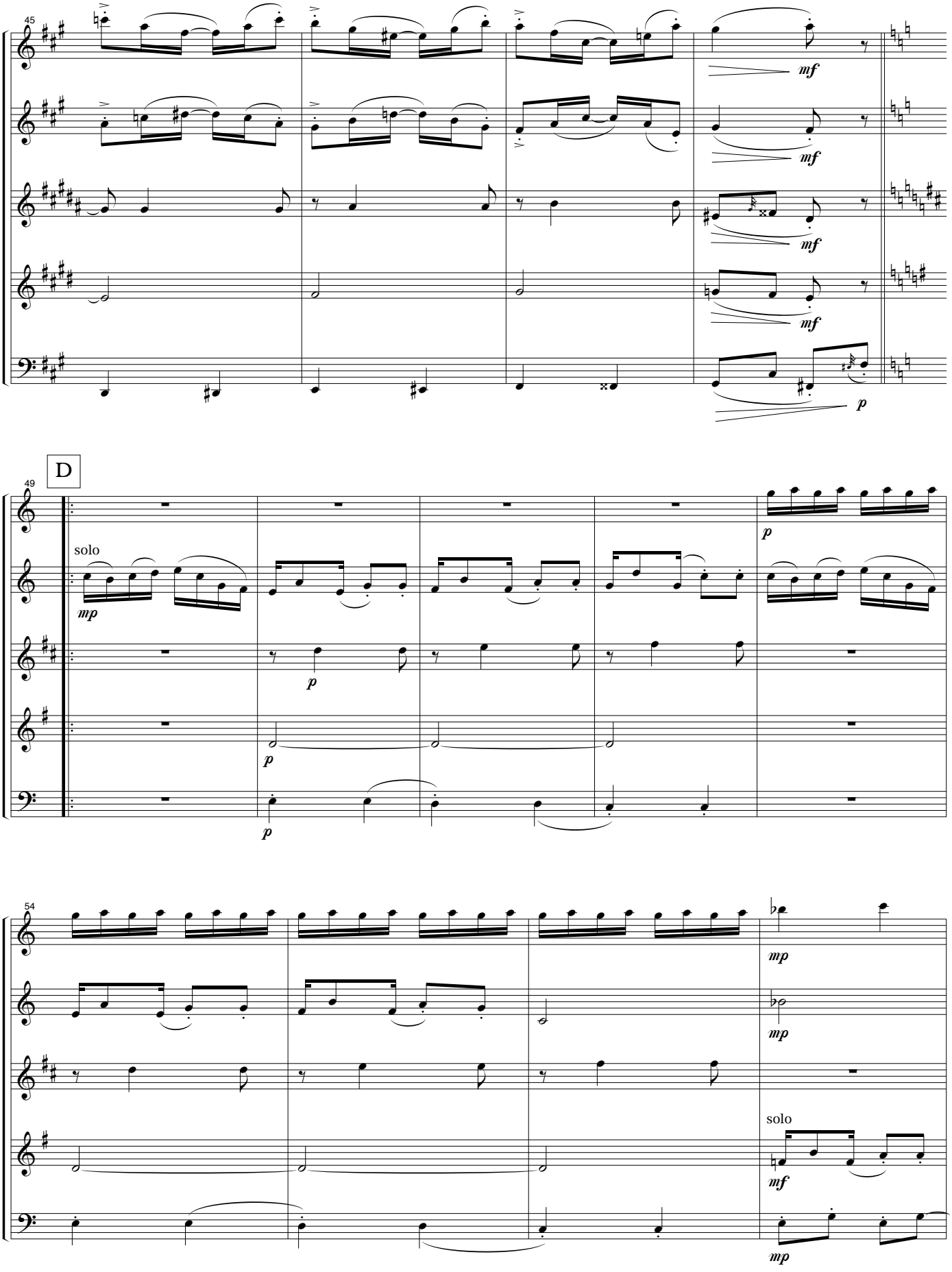
Allegro

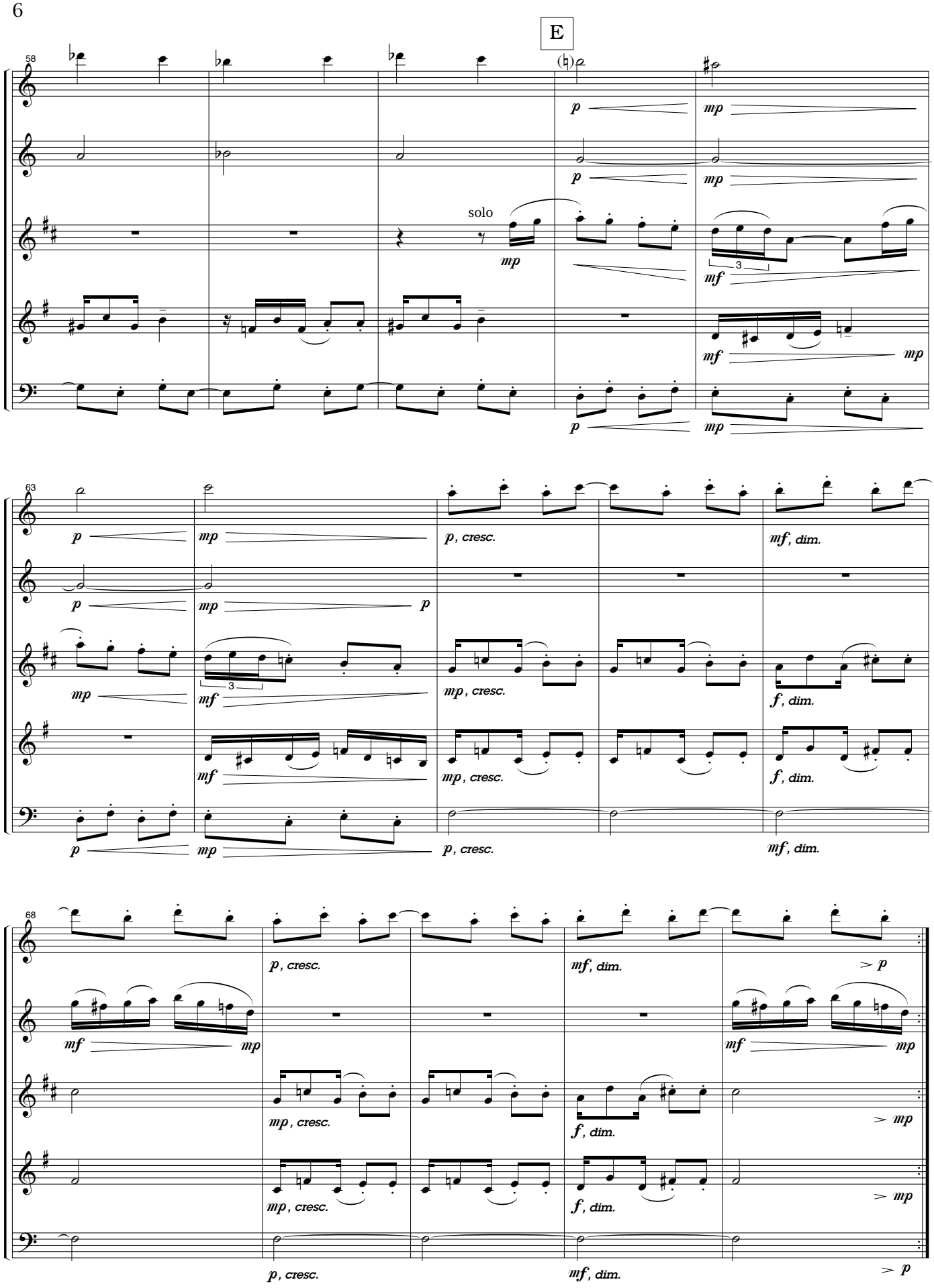


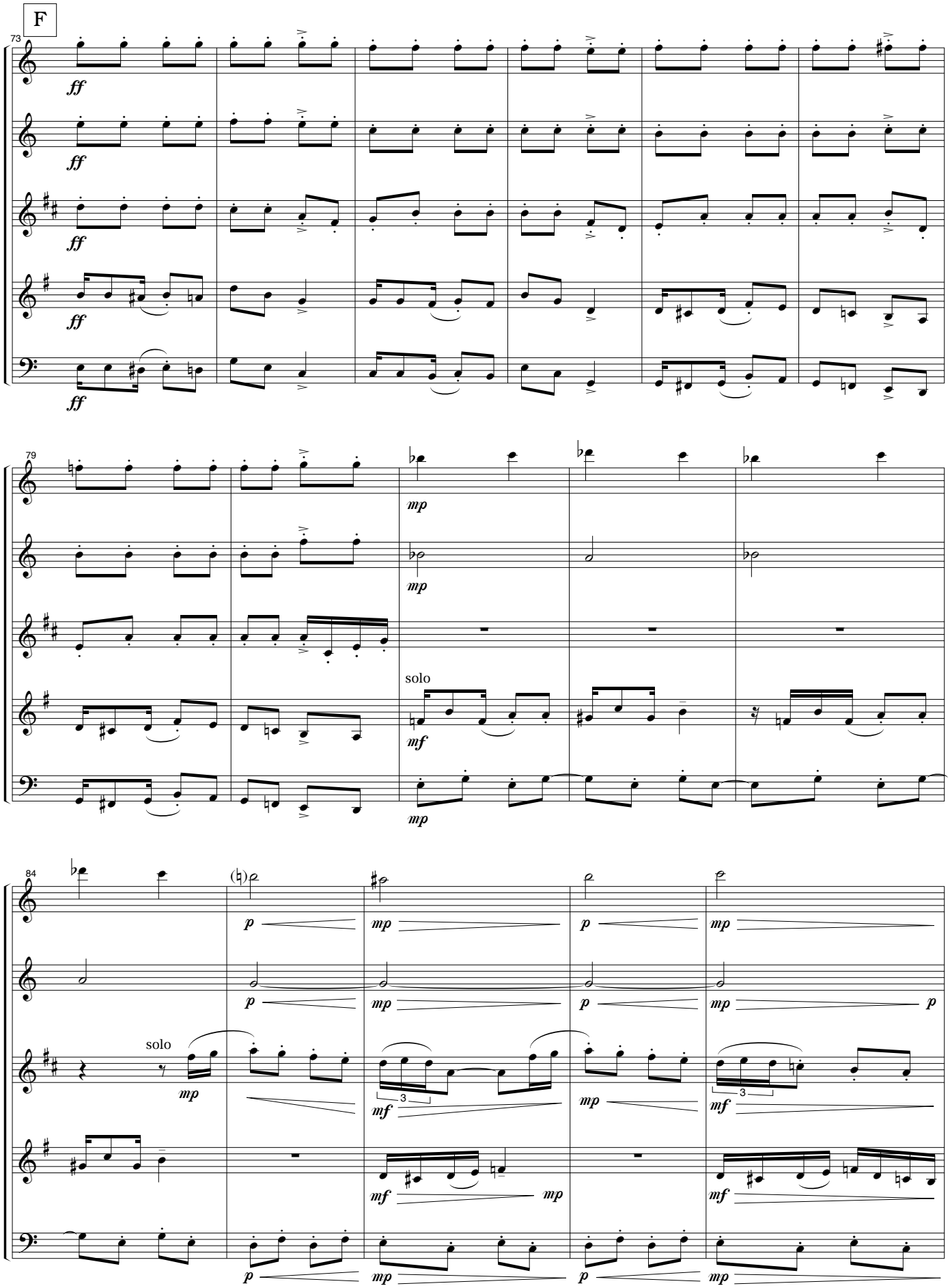


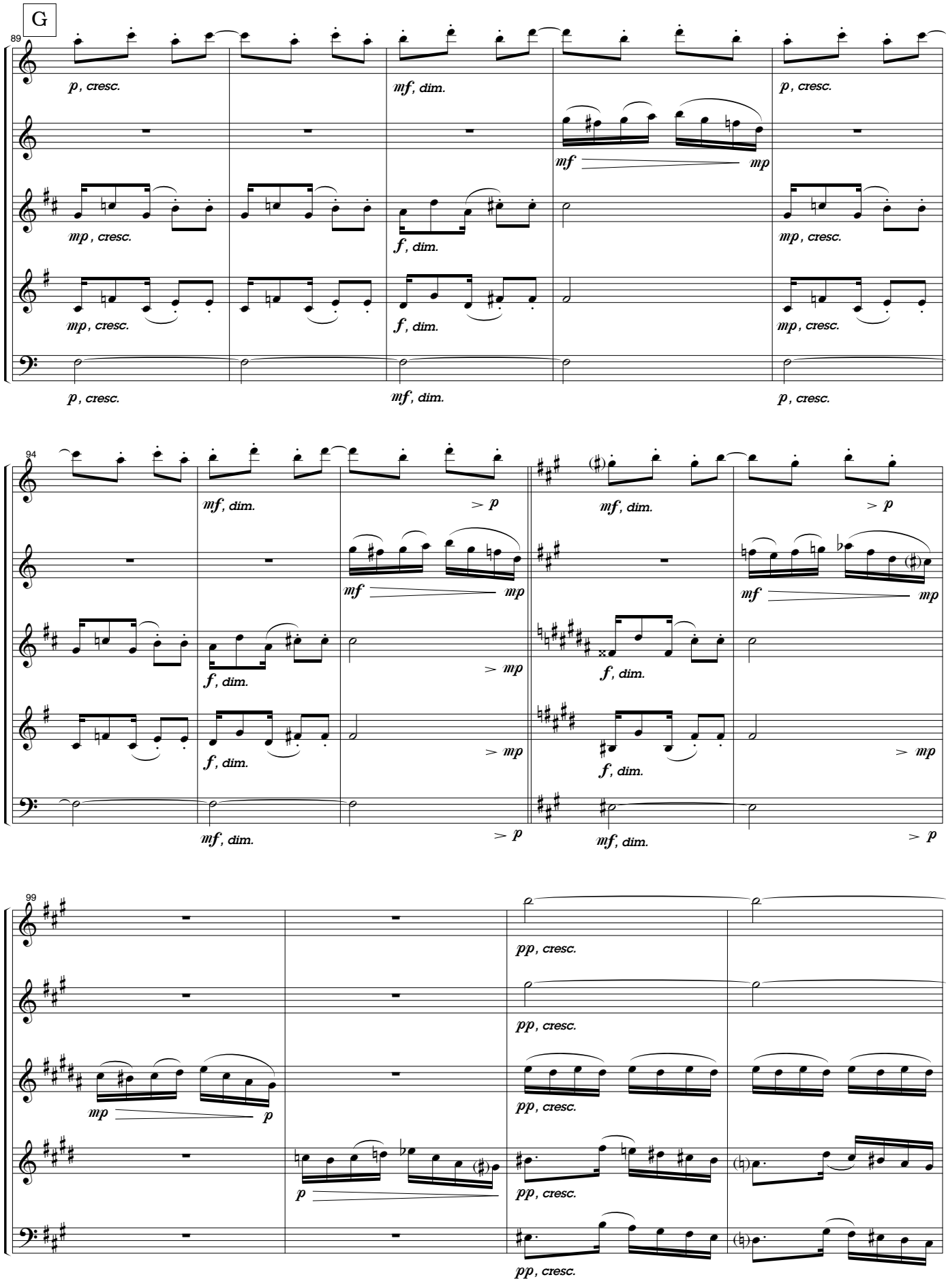
N.B.: Trills without suffix.

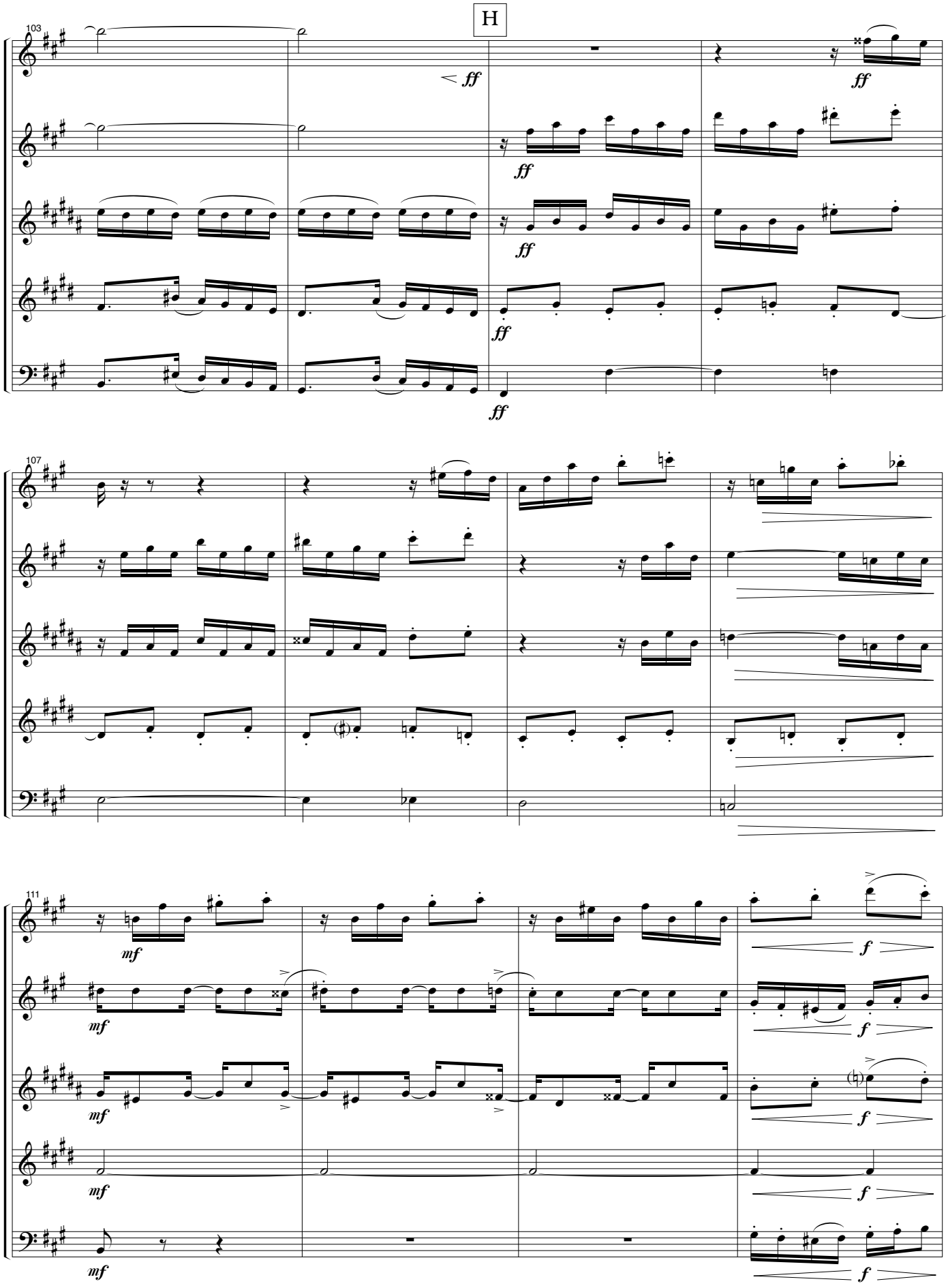

34
p, cresc.
p
cresc.
C
37
ff
mf, cresc.
41
tr
mf, cresc.

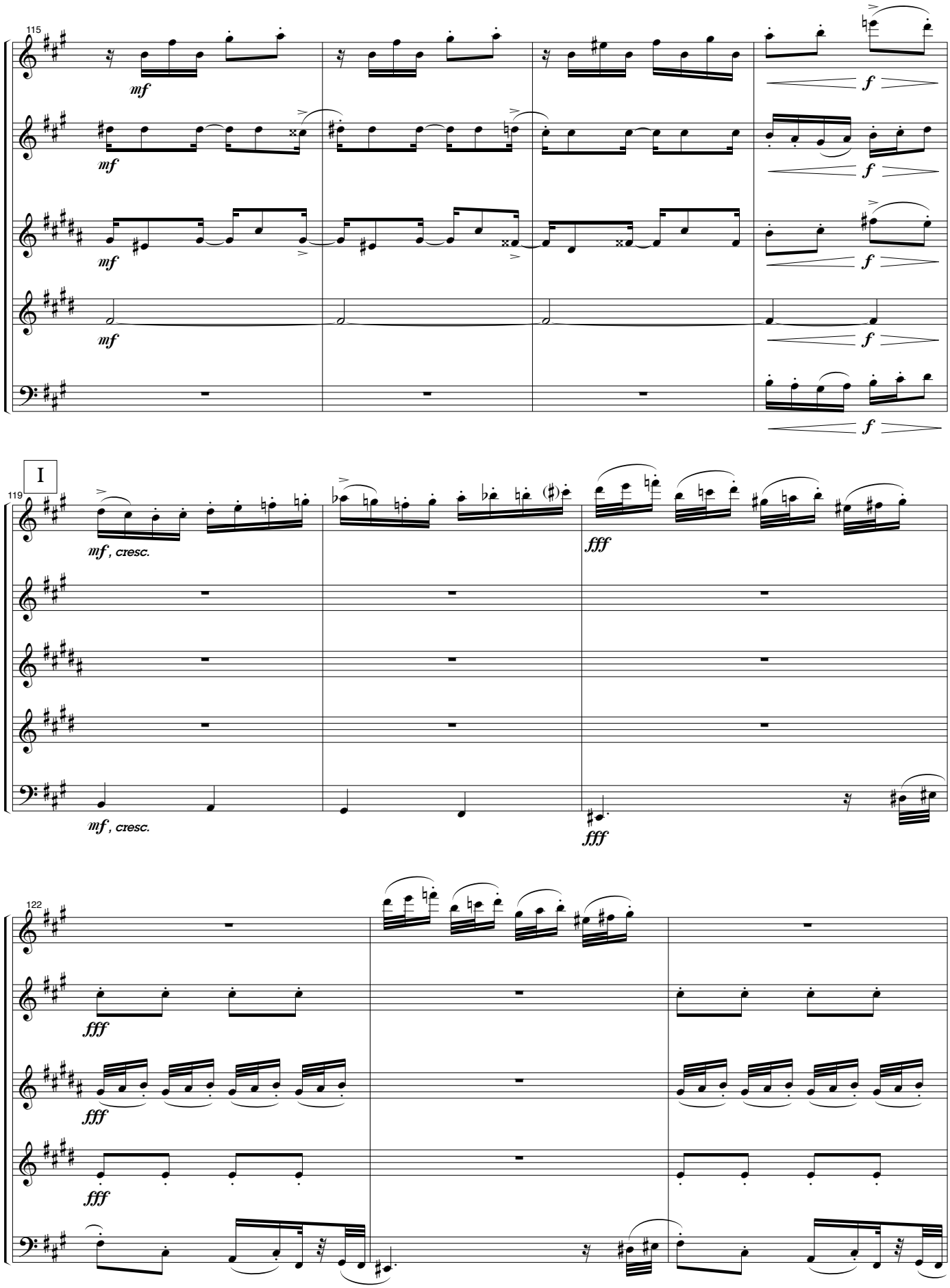

45
mf
mf
mf
mf
p
D
49
solo
mp
p
p
p
p
54
mp
mp
solo
mf
mp

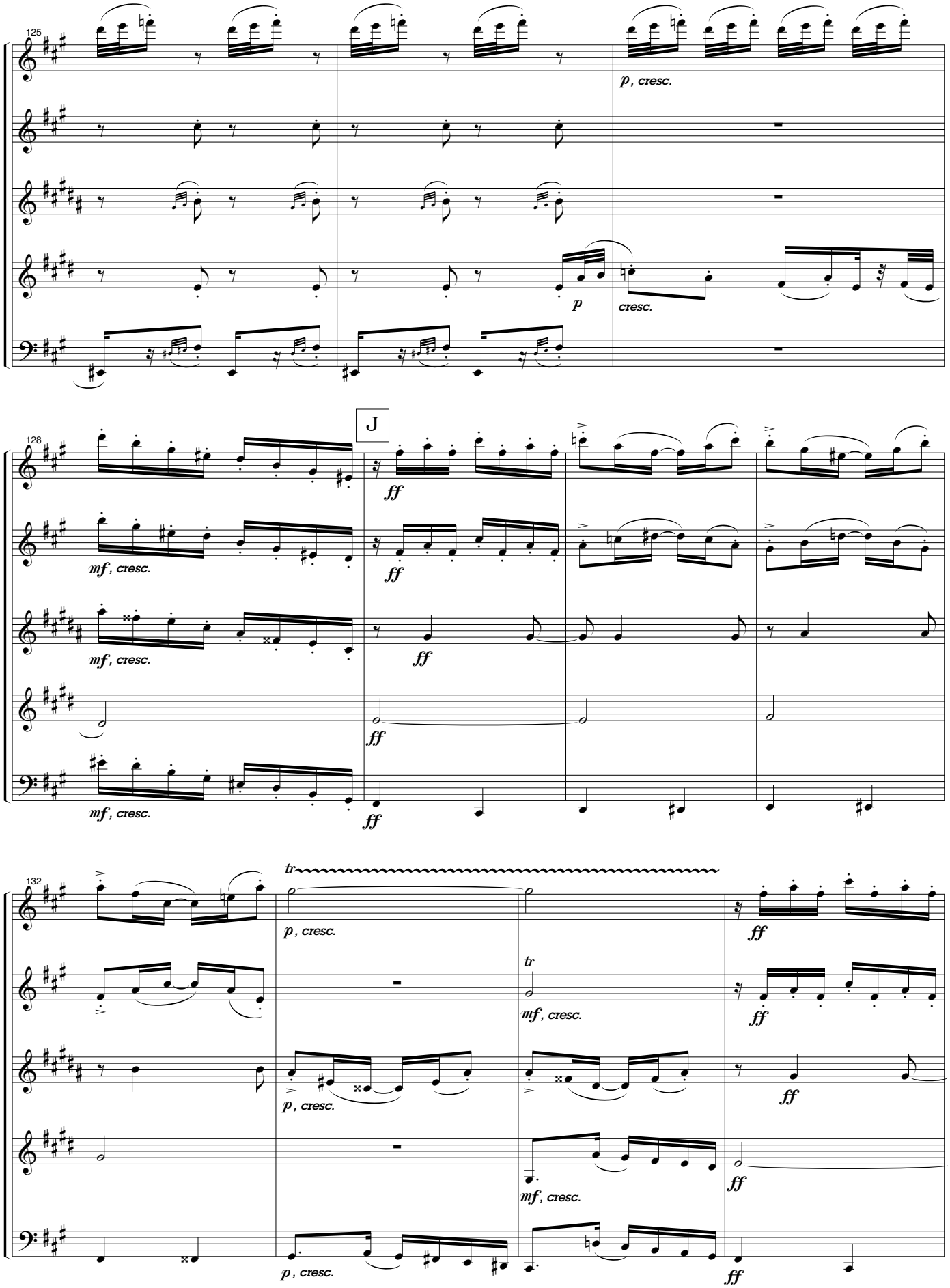

E
58
solo
63
68

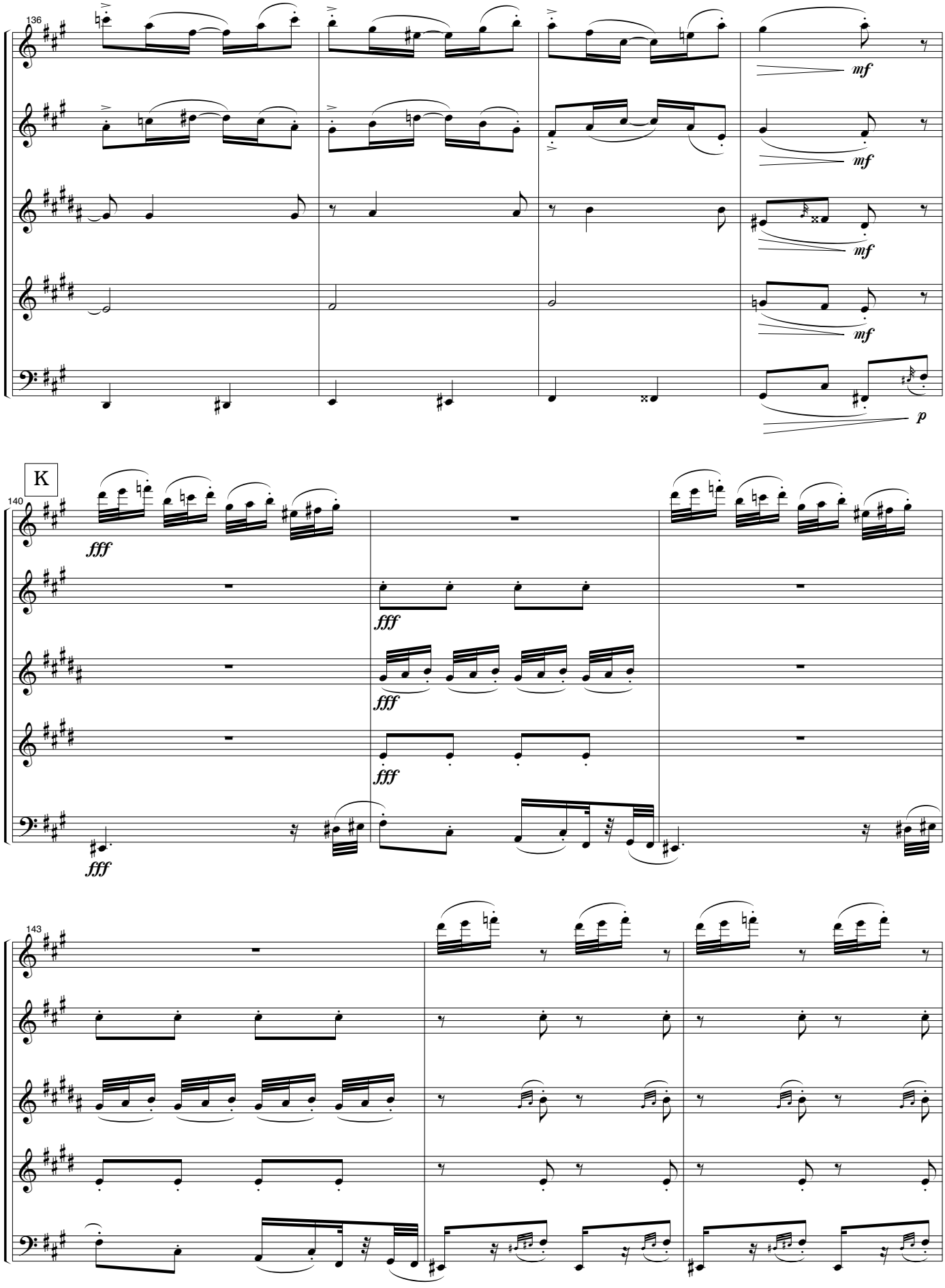

F
73
ff
79
mp
solo
mf
84
(♮)
p
solo
3

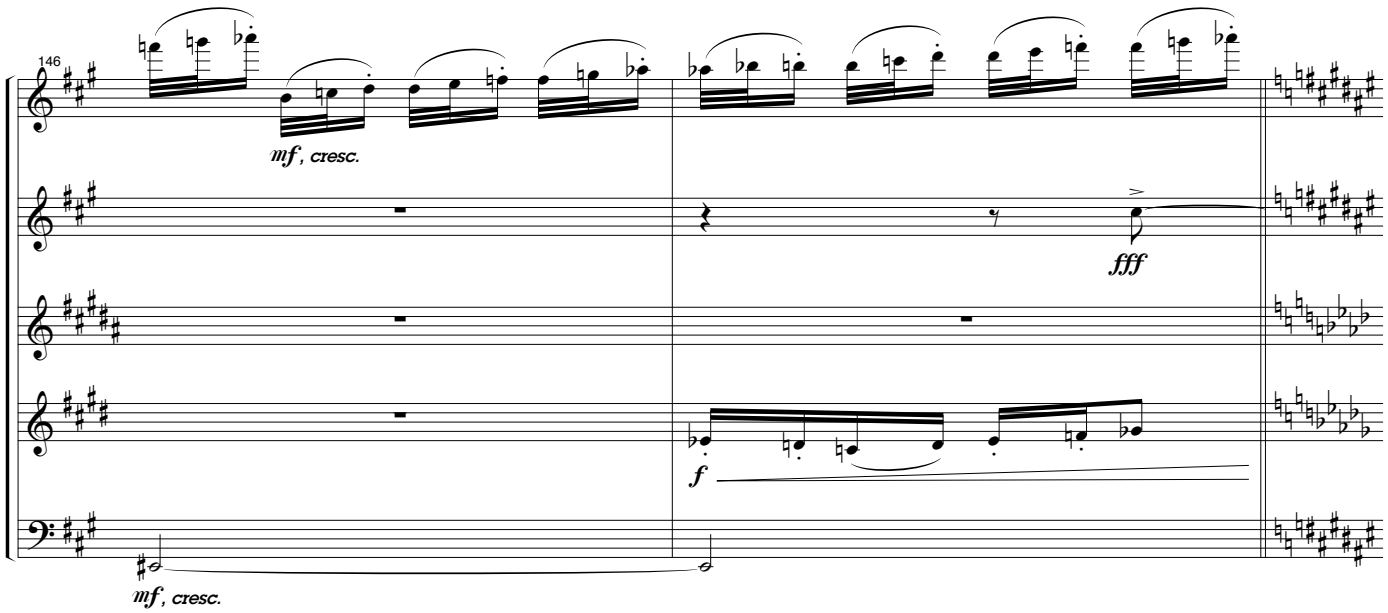

G
89
p, cresc.
mf, dim.
p, cresc.
mf
mp
mp, cresc.
f, dim.
mp, cresc.
94
mf, dim.
> p
mf
mp
> mp
f, dim.
99
pp, cresc.
mp
p

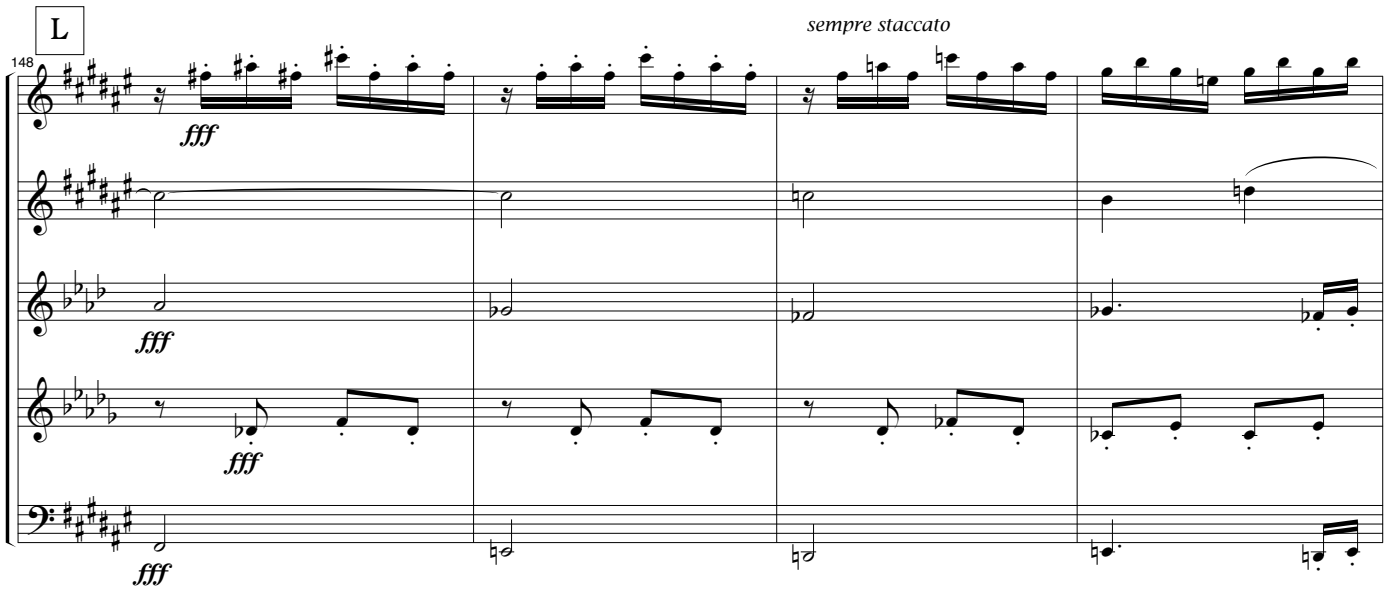

H
103
ff
107
111
mf
f

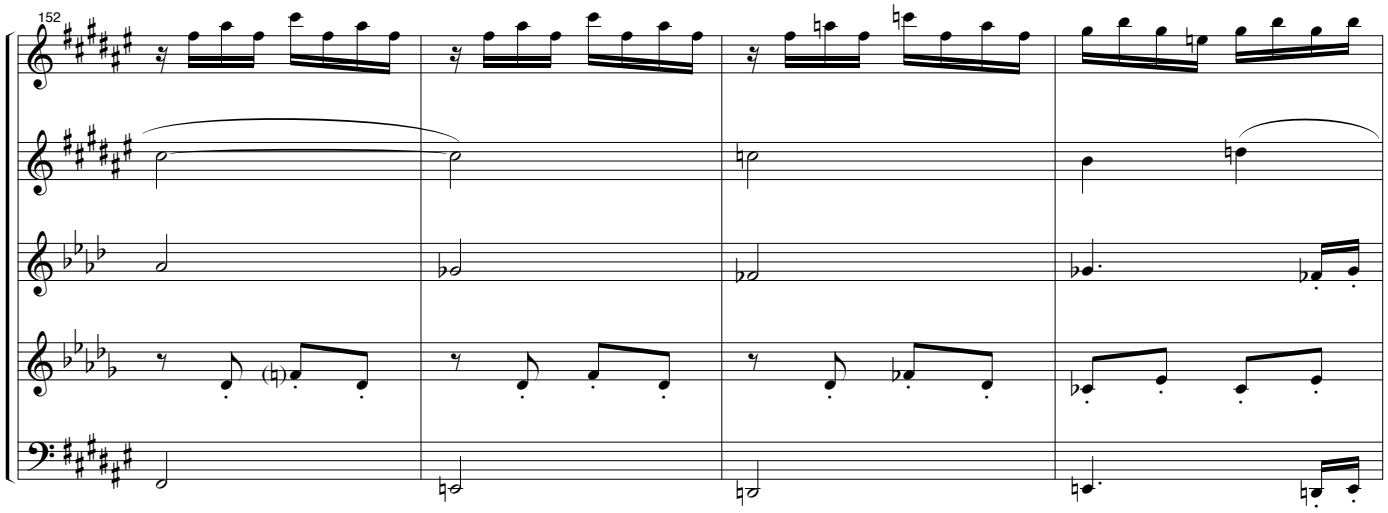

115
mf
f
I
119
mf, cresc.
fff
122


125
p, cresc.
p
cresc.
128
J
ff
mf, cresc.
132
tr
p, cresc.
mf, cresc.


136
mf
mf
mf
mf
p
K
140
fff
fff
fff
fff
143


146
mf, cresc.
fff
f
mf, cresc.


L
148
sempre staccato
fff
fff
fff
fff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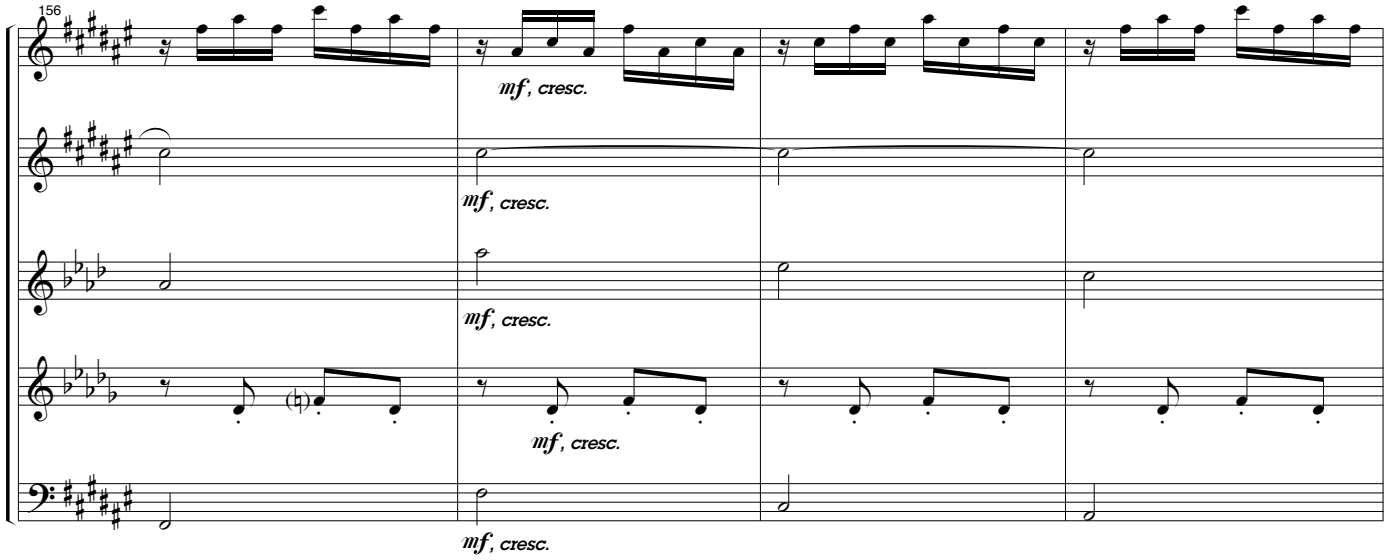
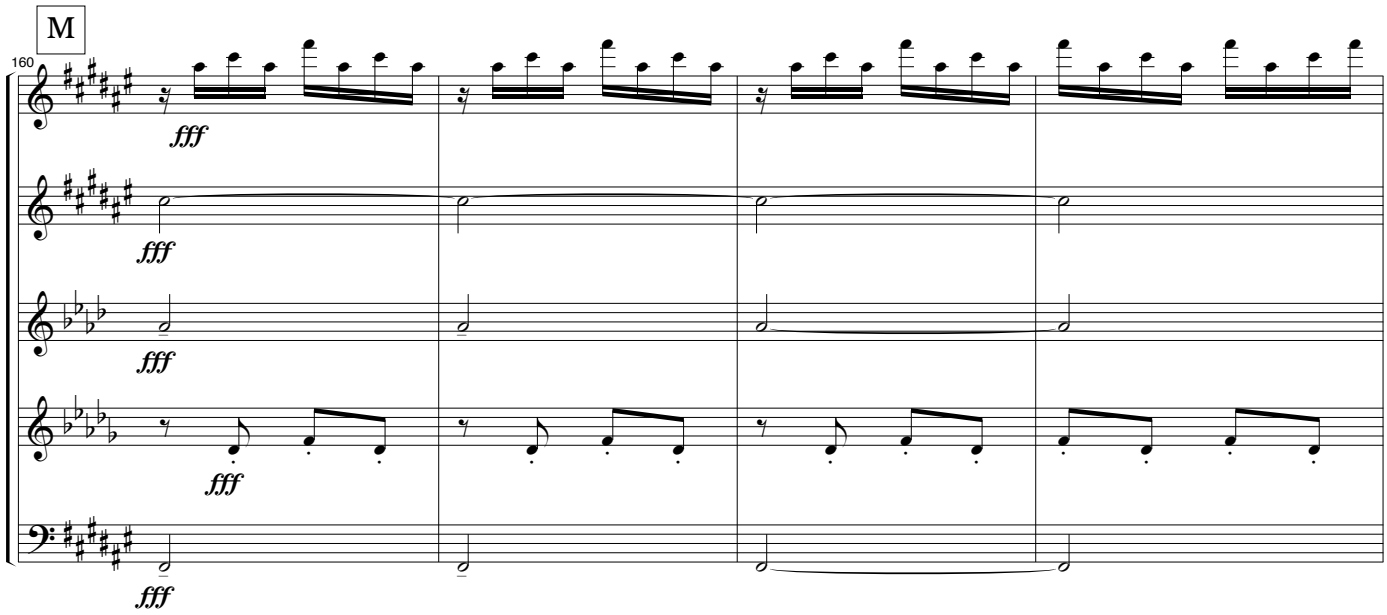
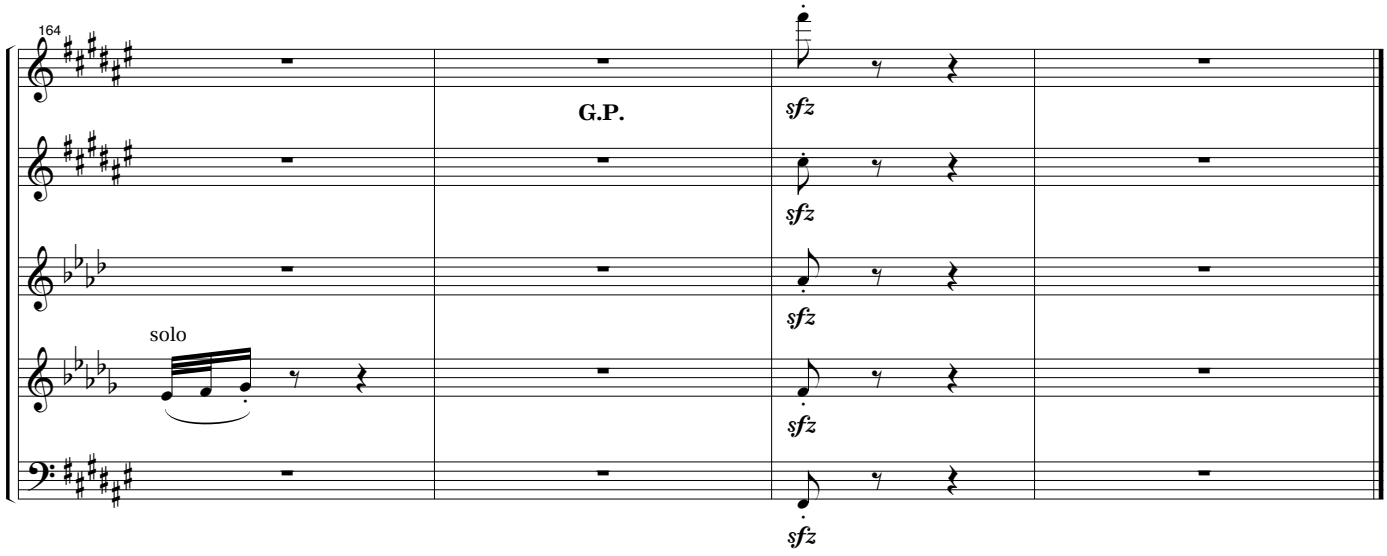

156
mf, cresc.
mf, cresc.
mf, cresc.
mf, cresc.
mf, cresc.


M
160
fff
fff
fff
fff


164
G.P.
sfz
sfz
sfz
sfz
sfz
solo